COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES
UIC

April 27, 2023

Re: Proposals For Updating Census Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards

Dear NAC Members:

We are six Latino/a faculty from diverse backgrounds and across multiple institutions and regions (bios included below) who each have worked extensively in the area of Latinos and racial identity in ways that are highly relevant to the proposed changes to Census racial measurement. In fact, three of us have written books that are specifically about Latinos and the Census. And one of us, Julie Dowling, served on the NAC for 6 years, chairing the committee during the 2020 Census. We write to express our strong support of the combined race and Latino origin question ("Optimal Design") that is currently being put forward for consideration by the US Census Bureau. Five percent of Latinos did not answer their Census in 2020, leading to a substantial loss of funding to our communities. Latinos are facing significant undercounts, and this new question design will reduce barriers to filling out the Census form and give us much more accurate data on Latinos.

The current two question format creates a serious impediment to the collection of accurate data on Latinos. This is because many Latinos cannot find a racial box that represents them and leave the question blank or answer "some other race," resulting in a large percentage of Latino racial responses being imputed. A significant number of Latinos do not answer the race question - 13% in 2010, 8% in 2020. When this data is missing, Census then imputes their race, often relying on the race of their neighbor. So for 2010, 1 out of every 7 Latinos had their race literally made up. In any given Census, another 35-40% of Latinos check "some other race" and write in a Latino identity. So approximately half of Latinos are not giving an OMB racial category. When Census creates population estimates to match with state data, they have to re-allocate these non-OMB responses into OMB categories. So in 2020, 43.6% of Latinos either did not answer the race question (8%) or said "some other race" (35%)— that translates into nearly 44% of Latinos having racial data imputed for them, and in that process most are allocated to white.

This impacts the legitimacy and utility of racial data for Latinos, but also means our country's "white" category has people who are not racialized as white in it, impacting our ability to look critically at racial disparities. Dramatic differences between whites and Blacks for example may be muted somewhat by the inclusion of Latinos (and MENA persons) in the white category who do not identify as white and are not seen by others as white, but who have either checked white because they do not have another option or have been allocated to the white box.

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In addition to the significant amount of imputed racial data for Latinos in the current format, there is also the issue of the accuracy of racial reporting for Latinos in the separate question format. Numerous studies (Dowling 2014, Roth 2010) have shown that in the separate questions format, Latinos checking "white" are often not seen as phenotypically white, nor do they identify as white outside the census. When forced to choose an OMB race with no Latino option, they rely on a number of factors (racial ideology, asserting American-ness to the government, etc) (Dowling 2014). But, work by both sociologists and the census testing in AQE and NCT show that white responses in the separate question format often do not match Latino respondents' identities. When interviewed in the Census testing, most Latinos who checked "white" in the separate questions format said they did NOT identify as white.

The combined "Optimal Design" format gives us much better data on racial variation among Latinos. In the combined question model 9-16% of Latinos checked the white and Latino boxes. The important difference is they actually did consider themselves to be white Latinos. It was actually a meaningful identity for them. Importantly, the number of those who identified as Black and Latino was similar in separate and combined questions, with the combined question yielding just slightly more Afro-Latinos than separate questions format in the NCT (1.8% vs 1.5%). The 1.8% in combined approach is the same as the actual count of those who checked Black and Latino in the 2020 Census (also 1.8%) with separate questions. So the number of Afro-Latinos does not decline, and with a combined approach the white Latinos are actually white Latinos. This means the data could give us much more meaningful comparisons among Latinos by race. The current format likely underestimates the disparity between white and Black Latinos because so many non-white Latinos are checking white or being allocated into white.

Numerous studies have shown that Latinos have faced racialization and discrimination, and that many Latinos both identify themselves and are seen by others as racially Latino. The combined format allows those Latinos who identify their racial identity as Latino to answer as such without being re-allocated to white. There is a long-standing history of racialization of Latinos in this country. In Texas, for example, Mexican Americans faced Jim Crow style segregation which included being excluded from schools, public swimming pools, restaurants, movie theaters, and even cemeteries. Perhaps one of the most publicly shared stories of this racial discrimination is the story of Felix Longoria whose body was returned to his home state of Texas in 1949 after dying while fighting for his country in WWII, only to be denied burial in his hometown because the funeral home and cemetery there were for "whites only." In interviews with Latinos in Texas, Dowling (2014) noted nearly all of the Mexican American respondents she interviewed who were over the age of forty at the time recalled facing extreme forms of discrimination such as attending separate schools and seeing signs on restaurants that said things like "No Dogs, Negros, or Mexicans." This discrimination was not limited to Texas, but also existed across the country. In both Texas and California, Mexican Americans challenged school segregation. Indeed, the battle against school segregation would continue into the civil rights movement in the 1960s and beyond. Many schools remain rigidly segregated to this day, with Latino students throughout the nation facing discrimination and tracking in schooling. The absence of the ability of Latinos to articulate their racialized identities as Latinos is both an affront to this history, and a denial of their continued experiences with racism.

The Census has tried for years to push Latinos to fit themselves into one of the five OMB racial categories. They moved the Latino origin question in front of the race question to elicit greater

response. They put instructions "For this Census, Hispanic origins are not races" in 2010 and 2020. All of this was in an effort to get Latinos not to put a Latino response for their race. Yet, the number of "some other race" just grows each decade and is now the second largest "racial" group, and 94% of "some other race" responses are Latino. That is because for many Latinos, this is their racial identity. We need a format that allows them to identify as Latino on this question. There are Latinos who are racialized as Black, White, Asian, and Indigenous and identify with these categories, but there are many – approximately 70% from the NCT testing – that identify as racially Latino. That is their racial reality.

The combined format allows for the ability of Latinos to use whatever boxes they wish to indicate their identities and racialized experiences. This allows for those who identify racially as Latino to do so, but also gives us better and much more accurate data on Latinos who identify as white or Black. This will give us significantly better data on racial diversity within our Latino community than the current format.

Thank you for your consideration of our comment.

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Bios

Julie Dowling

Dr. Dowling is Associate Professor of Sociology and Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of Illinois Chicago. Her research has focused on the US Census and how definitions of race and ethnicity are understood by Latino/as. Dowling's (2014) book, *Mexican Americans and*

the Question of Race, explored the disjuncture between federal definitions and regional constructions of race, examining Mexican American responses to the U.S. Census race question. Her book examined how Mexican Americans make decisions about identifying their race. Dowling found the difference between "White" and "other race" Mexican Americans in her study was not how they have been racialized, but rather, how they frame their experiences with racialization through the use of discursive strategies. Those who identified as "White" on the census did not label as White in their daily lives, but calculated this response in an effort to assert an "American" identity to the US government in the face of racialized discrimination. This was a critical finding, as many had assumed that racial identification as "White" on the census reflected skin color or assimilation. The book earned an Honorable Mention for the Oliver Cromwell Cox Book Award from the American Sociological Association's Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities. Dowling's research on Latinos and the Census garnered national attention and in 2014, and she was appointed to the federal advisory committee to the US Census Bureau—the National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations (2014-20). In addition to her work with the Census Bureau, Dr. Dowling has done multiple presentations and consultations with legislators and non-profit groups on census issues. In 2018, she briefed Congressional Staff on Capitol Hill, as well as state legislative Latino/a leaders from across the country on topics related Census 2020. At the state-level, she has educated Illinois-based community groups, non-profit organizations, and advocacy groups on the census. In addition, she has shared her expertise with legislators across the state, speaking with both the State of Illinois' Census Advisory Panel and the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus. In 2022, Dowling was recognized for extraordinary efforts to bring sociological scholarship into the public eye with a national award from the American Sociological Association. She was awarded ASA's Public Understanding of Sociology Award in recognition of her continued engagement and leadership in public arenas with institutions whose decisions and policies have a major impact on the lives of immigrants, refugees, and the larger community.

Cristina Mora

Dr. Mora is Associate Professor of Sociology and Chicano/Latino Studies (by courtesy) and the Co-Director of the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley. Her research focuses mainly on questions of census racial classification, immigration, and racial politics in the United States and Europe. Dr. Mora's *Making Hispanics: How Activist, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* is a groundbreaking book that historicizes the development of the category of Hispanic identity from the 1960's through the 1990's. This panethnic category has typically been depicted as the product of the federal government, with little attention to the role of advocacy groups and marketing. Mora's work challenges this by presenting a compelling "interactive account" that examines the relationship between advocacy groups, the US Census Bureau, and the media in the creation and marketing of Hispanic identity. Her book cogently argues that the institutionalization of this identity involved a concerted effort orchestrated between bureaucrats, political groups, and the media who worked together in this endeavor. This work, along with related articles, has received wide recognition, including the 2010 Best Dissertation Award and the 2018 Early Career Award (SREM) from the American Sociological Association. *Making Hispanics* has also been the subject of several NPR and national media segments on Census Politics and Latino identity. Her work has been published in venues such as *American Sociological Review*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Latino Studies*, and the *Du Bois Review*. She is currently working on two new book projects funded by the Russell Sage Foundation. The first, *California Color Lines: Racial Politics in an Era of Economic Precarity* (w. T. Paschel) examines the contradictions of racial politics in nation's most diverse and seemingly progressive state. The

second, *Race and the Politics of Trust in an Age of Government Cynicism* (w. J. Dowling and M. Rodriguez-Muniz) provides the first mixed methods examination of race and political trust in the U.S. In April of 2020, Mora oversaw the largest survey on Covid-19 economic and health impacts in California.

Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

Dr. Rodríguez-Muñiz's is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. His research and teaching focuses on race and the politics of knowledge, primarily in Latino/a/x communities and movements. His book, *Figures of the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change* (Princeton University Press, 2021), examines contemporary political struggles and meaning-making processes through which individuals and societies come to envision and sense demographic change. The book, which is an extension of his award-winning dissertation, is based on several years of ethnographic research on national Latino advocacy organizations during the Obama and Trump presidencies. In the book, he delves into the role of politics in crafting our understandings of population change. Focusing specifically on Latinos, Rodríguez-Muñiz shows how Latino civil rights organizations have attempted to translate numbers into power, highlighting their increasing demographic figures with the hope for the collective power that this could create. But long-standing political backlashes that cast Latinos (and other racialized minorities) as a political threat due to their increasing numbers make the politics of numbers particularly challenging for this population, as they are constantly undertaking attempts to rebrand and revision Latino population growth in a positive light. The book draws on an extensive range of materials from seven years of ethnographic fieldwork. This research involved participant observation in Latino political conventions, voter registration drives, public forums, as well as interviews with eighty participants including political leaders, activists, volunteers, and elected officials who work in the realm of Latino civil rights issues. The book includes an impressive range of primary documents including print media, policy reports, infographics, and images used by Latino political activists. Rodríguez-Muñiz's book has been widely acclaimed and was the recipient of a national award in 2022—the Distinguished Contribution Award for Best Book from the American Sociological Association's Latino/a Sociology Section. His work has also appeared in top journals including *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, *Du Bois Review*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *Ethnography*. A committed community scholar, Rodríguez-Muñiz is also creating a Puerto Rican archive in Chicago that documents the history of community struggle and organization.

Jonathan Rosa

Dr. Rosa is Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education, Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, and, by courtesy, Departments of Anthropology, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature at Stanford University. Dr. Rosa is also Director of Stanford's Program in Chicanx-Latinx Studies and Co-Director of the Center for Global Ethnography. His research examines the co-naturalization of language and race as a key feature of modern governance. Dr. Rosa is author of the award-winning book Looking like a *Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad* (2019, Oxford University Press). He examines the critical role of racialization of language in the development and persistence of racial categorization for Latinos. Specifically, he tracks colonially structured interrelations among racial marginalization, linguistic stigmatization, and institutional inequity. Dr. Rosa collaborates with local communities to investigate these phenomena and develop tools for understanding and

challenging the forms of disparity to which they correspond. This community-based approach to research, teaching, and service reflects a vision of scholarship as a platform for imagining and enacting more just societies. Dr. Rosa is co-editor of the volume Language and Social Justice in Practice (2019, Routledge). His work has appeared in scholarly journals such as the *Harvard Educational Review*, *American Ethnologist*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, and *Language in Society*, as well as media outlets such as The New York Times, The Nation, NPR, and Univision. Dr. Rosa obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, and his B.A. in Linguistics and Educational Studies from Swarthmore College.

Nicholas Vargas

Dr. Vargas is currently Associate Professor of Latin American Studies at the University of Florida, but he will be joining the faculty at University of California at Berkeley as an Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies in July 2023. He has authored over a dozen articles dealing with labeling and identity for Latinos, as well as researched how institutions utilize such data. Vargas' scholarship on the multidimensionality of race and racialization has culminated in national recognition among peers and leaders in the field. Indeed, he was recently elected Chair of the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Section of Racial and Ethnic Minorities which is among the largest sections in the discipline's premiere professional organization with over 1000 members. Dr. Vargas' research interrogates racial identity and ideology issues in Latino/a/x populations. His research documents how socially constructed categories of race are measured and used in social science research. He draws methodologically from quantitative methods to analyze national survey data and to reflect upon potential and ongoing transformations to the U.S. racial order. His scholarship on Latino/a racial classification has advanced core debates over how Latino/as are understood racially. Specifically, he has drawn from a multitude of nationally representative survey data sets to explore the vitality of a proposed "Latino Whitening" hypothesis. This hypothesis put forward by some demographers argues that Latino/as are on the path to full assimilation into whiteness much like the European immigrants of the early 20th century. In an important and well-cited article, Vargas refutes this hypothesis as he finds that Latino/as continue to face racialization as non-White. With a unique data set, he found that only a very small subset (approximately 6 percent) of Latino/as—those with light skin-tones and high household incomes generally report being perceived as non-Hispanic White by others. Thus, countering the Latino Whitening hypothesis, his research finds little evidence that the racial boundary between U.S. Whiteness and "Latino" is merging over time. His work rather supports arguments of continued racialization and a need to acknowledge the racialized identity of Latino/as. His research garnered national attention and was featured in multiple media venues, including NBC, The American Prospect, The National Institute for Latino Policy, and La Opinion (the largest U.S. Spanish language newspaper).

Sylvia Zamora

Dr. Zamora's is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Loyola Marymount University. Her recent book, *Racial Baggage: Mexican Immigrants and Race Across the Border*, is a critical examination of Mexican racial identity on both sides of the border. Drawing on interviews with both recent and established Mexican migrants in the Los Angeles area, as well as non-migrants in Mexico, she demonstrates how racial ideologies travel across the US-Mexico border. Her book highlights the lives of recent Mexican immigrants who arrived in Los Angeles as they first begin to decipher race relations in the US context. She documents how more established Mexican immigrants begin to cement their understandings of race and the crucial role of undocumented status in the construction

of their racial identities. Dr. Zamora has additionally published multiple peer-reviewed journal articles, including two award-winning articles published in *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Dr. Zamora's article, "Mexican Illegality, Black Citizenship, and White Power: Immigrant Perceptions of the US Socioracial Hierarchy," which focused on immigrant understandings of racial hierarchies in the US won the Distinguished Contribution to Research Best Article Award from the Latino/a Sociology Section of American Sociological Association (ASA). And her article, "Racial Remittances: The Effect of Migration on Racial Ideologies in Mexico and the United States" won awards from both the International Migration Section of ASA and the ASA Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities. Dr. Zamora's work includes multiple pieces that examine racial coalition building between Latinos and African Americans, exploring points of solidarity and conflict. Her new forthcoming book chapter with Nadia Kim, is an expansive project exploring changing racial attitudes since Rodney King based on survey data. A recent recipient of the prestigious Woodrow Wilson National Career Enhancement Fellowship, she is a nationally recognized scholar of Latino racial identity, racial attitudes, and African American and Latino relations. Her appearance on such major news platforms as Univision and multiple op ed pieces demonstrate the reach of her scholarship well beyond the academy.